

Beowulf

II

WENT he forth to find at fall of night
that haughty house, and heed wherever
the Ring-Danes, outrevelled, to rest had gone.
Found within it the atheling band
asleep after feasting and fearless of sorrow,
of human hardship. Unhallowed wight,
grim and greedy, he grasped betimes,
wrathful, reckless, from resting-places,
thirty of the thanes, and thence he rushed
fain of his fell spoil, faring homeward,
laden with slaughter, his lair to seek.
Then at the dawning, as day was breaking,
the might of Grendel to men was known;
then after wassail was wail uplifted,
loud moan in the morn. The mighty chief,
atheling excellent, unblithe sat,
labored in woe for the loss of his thanes,
when once had been traced the trail of the fiend,
spirit accurst: too cruel that sorrow,
too long, too loathsome. Not late the respite;
with night returning, anew began
ruthless murder; he recked no whit,
firm in his guilt, of the feud and crime.
They were easy to find who elsewhere sought
in room remote their rest at night,
bed in the bowers, [footnote 1] when that bale was shown,
was seen in sooth, with surest token, --
the hall-thane's [footnote 2] hate. Such held themselves
far and fast who the fiend outran!
Thus ruled unrighteous and raged his fill
one against all; until empty stood
that lordly building, and long it bode so.
Twelve years' tide the trouble he bore,
sovrän of Scyldings, sorrows in plenty,
boundless cares. There came unhidden
tidings true to the tribes of men,
in sorrowful songs, how ceaselessly Grendel
harassed Hrothgar, what hate he bore him,
what murder and massacre, many a year,
feud unfading, -- refused consent
to deal with any of Daneland's earls,
make pact of peace, or compound for gold:
still less did the wise men ween to get

great fee for the feud from his fiendish hands.
 But the evil one ambushed old and young
 death-shadow dark, and dogged them still,
 lured, or lurked in the livelong night
 of misty moorlands: men may say not
 where the haunts of these Hell-Runes [footnote 3] be.
 Such heaping of horrors the hater of men,
 lonely roamer, wrought unceasing,
 harassings heavy. O'er Heorot he lorded,
 gold-bright hall, in gloomy nights;
 and ne'er could the prince [footnote 4] approach his throne,
 -- 'twas judgment of God, -- or have joy in his hall.
 Sore was the sorrow to Scyldings'-friend,
 heart-rending misery. Many nobles
 sat assembled, and searched out counsel
 how it were best for bold-hearted men
 against harassing terror to try their hand.
 Whiles they vowed in their heathen fanes
 altar-offerings, asked with words [footnote 5]
 that the slayer-of-souls would succor give them
 for the pain of their people. Their practice this,
 their heathen hope; 'twas Hell they thought of
 in mood of their mind. Almighty they knew not,
 Doomsman of Deeds and dreadful Lord,
 nor Heaven's-Helmet heeded they ever,
 Wielder-of-Wonder. -- Woe for that man
 who in harm and hatred hales his soul
 to fiery embraces; -- nor favor nor change
 awaits he ever. But well for him
 that after death-day may draw to his Lord,
 and friendship find in the Father's arms!

Footnotes.

1.
Ship.
2.
Grendel.
3.
"Sorcerers-of-hell."
4.
Hrothgar, who is the "Scyldings'-friend" ...
5.
That is, in formal or prescribed phrase.